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ABSTRACT

The Family Relationships Project consisted of a three-year investigation of individual and family development. From the first year sample, 120 subjects were selected from 3 age groups (ages 22, 24, and 26) and 2 role groups (single and married without children) for an examination of the validity of the Family Relationships Interview (FRI). Subjects completed, among other measures, the FRI and Loevinger's Sentence Completion Task. The FRI's family development stage scores, with a possible range of stage one (hierarchichal parent-child relationship) to stage six (peer-like relationship), ranged from stage two to a transition between stages four and five. Marital status was the most powerful predictor of stage scores for the mother and the father. Analyses also yielded a main effect for age and an age by sex interaction effect for stage scores with the mother. Data from the 60 women subjects revealed a significant relationship between Loevinger's ego development stage scores and FRI stage scores. Subjects with higher FRI scores were more likely to give permission for the release of FRI questionnaires to their parents. Findings provided support for the validity of the FRI. (Author/NRB)

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Developmental Change and Mutuality in Family Relationships During Young Adulthood[1]

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Reciprocity in the Family and Developmental Change During Young Adulthood

Kathleen M. White Joseph C. Speisman

What is the developmental history of caring and caretaking relationships? What is the process by which cared for infants develop into caretaking adults? As yet there is little evidence available for answering such questions. Surely the goal of conceptualizing attachment as a life span developmental process (Ainsworth, 1976) must include notions of attachment as a reciprocal process which undergoes qualitative changes as the individuals involved in the attachment relationship themselves undergo qualitative changes in psychological functioning. In the Family Relationships Project, we are trying to contribute a few pieces to the puzzle by studying relationships between young adults and their parents.

There is some research in reciprocity in parent-child relationships during the infancy years (Bell, 1971; Harper, 1975; Kagan, 1971). There is also some research on relationships between aging parents and their middle-aged children (e.g., Hartup & Lempers, 1973). However, there is little evidence concerning reciprocity in parent-child relationships during the middle of the life span. Most of the available work focuses either on continuity of values or attitudes across the generations (e.g., Fengler, 1973) or psychopathology in parent-child relationships (see Biller & Davids, 1973).

Overall, research concerning development during the early and middle adult years is scanty (Neugarten, 1974; Troll, 1975). Research on adolescents is more extensive but within that literature, consideration of adolescent family relationships is limited and tends to focus on negative interactions. There is some evidence that as some young people go off to college, get married, or have children, relationships with their parents change - often in the direction of greater understanding and tolerance. There is also some evidence that qualitative changes in the ways individuals conceptualize about themselves, interact with others, and make judgments concerning ethical issues, can take place during the early adult years. The principal question being asked in the Family Relationships Project is: Are young adults who have entered into positive forms of reciprocal caring relationships with their parents functioning at higher stages of ethical, psychosocial, and ego development than comparable groups of young people who have not entered into such relationships? In this report we will present preliminary data about both family relationship stages and ego developmental stages in a sample of young adult subjects.

METHOD

Subjects

For purposes of the present report, we selected 120 men and women from a large sample of over 300 subjects participating in a three year mixed design study (combining longitudinal and cross-sectional components) being supported by The National Institute of Mental Health. These 120 men and women were drawn in equal numbers from three age groups (22, 24, and 26) and two marital status groups (single and married without children). Almost all subjects (112) are

living in separate dwellings from their parents. Fifty-nine of these subjects have been living independently of their parents for 3 years or more.

Although all subjects are white and the sample is largely middle class, we have been able to achieve some breadth on a number of demographic areas. Seven subjects (5.8%) had completed only high school or technical school, while, on the other end of the educational continuum, sixteen subjects (13.3%) had completed a graduate degree. A majority of subjects (74, or 61.6%) had completed a B.A. or B.S., with or without some graduate education. Forty-five subjects were either full or part time students at the time of their interview.

Not surprisingly, among our subjects' parents are many mothers and fathers with lower educational levels than their children's - although the opposite pattern holds as well. Fifteen fathers (12.5%) and 12 mothers (10%) had failed to complete high school. Twenty-eight fathers (23.2%) and 43 mothers (35.8%) had finished only high school or technical school. On the upper level of education, 29 fathers (24.2%) and 20 mothers (16.7%) had a graduate degree. While 22 fathers (18.3%) were involved in skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled labor, 29 (24.2%) were in the higher level professions.

Most of our subjects come from intact homes. Ninety sets of parents (75%) were still married and living together. Eleven subjects (9.2%) had parents who were divorced or separated. Eighteen subjects (15.0%) had lost one or both parents. Most parents had provided some sort of religious upbringing for their children. Forty-seven subjects (39.2%) were reared in Catholic homes; 38 (31.6%) were reared in Jewish homes; and 23 (19.2%) were reared in Protestant homes. Although we do not have data on current religious status for all subjects, 51 (43%) reported that they were non-practicing, agnostic, or atheistic.

Measures

Each subject participated in approximately 2½ hours of interviewing - including White's Family Relationship Interview, Marcia's Ego Identity Status Interview, Orlofsky's Intimacy Interview, and Selman's Perspective Taking Interview. Subjects also completed approximately 2½ hours of questionnaire measures intended to tap the same basic areas as the interviews - i.e., individual development, family relationships, and dyadic interactions. Only two measures will be discussed here - The Family Relationships Interview and Loevinger's Sentance Completion Task.

The Family Relationships Interview (FRI). Developed specifically for the purposes of th investigation, the FRI is a semi-structured interview covering four areas - current interactions, resolution of differences of opinion, advice-giving, and caretaking. In each of these areas, subjects are asked open-ended questions about their current relationships with their parents, changes in the relationship over time, their view of their parents, their parents' view of them, and the specific behaviors that characterize interaction.

Each area of the interview is scored separately for the developmental stage of the relationship with the mother and with the father. The stage scoring system ranges from a totally unindividuated hierarchical relationship at Stage 1 to a totally mutual peer-like relationship at Stage 6. With the inclusion of transitional stages, the stage scoring system converts to a scale scoring system with a potential range of 1 to 11.

What is unique about our scoring system is that what is being scored is not a developmental characteristic of an individual, but a developmental characteristic of a relationship as perceived by one party to that relationship. There are three major conceptual components underlying the scoring of the relationship—young adult and parent individuation, young adult and parent role-taking, and young adult and parent mutuality. A detailed scoring manual is being developed, and adequate interscorer reliability between the principa investigator and one research assistant already has been achieved. A brief summary of the defining characteristics of each stage is provided in Table 1. Thus far, only the current interactions portion of the FRI has been transcribed and scored, and it is these scores that were used for the analyses reported in this paper.

The Sentence Completion Test. Underlying Loevinger's 36-item Sentence Completion Test (Loevinger, 1966) is the assumption that there are potentially seven stages of ego development, each more complex than the preceding one. Although these stages form an invariant sequence, not all individuals proceed through all stages. The stage at which an individual stops in the sequence is expected to have implications for a number of aspects of ego development - including conscious preoccupations and interpersonal style. Responses to the 36 sentence stems of Loevinger's test are used to determine the predominant or core level of ego development characteristic of the respondent. Although arguing for the need for further construct validation of the Loevinger measure, Hauser (1976) reports good interscorer reliability. Hauser warns against expecting linear relations between ego development stages and other variables. To determine the extent to which Loevinger is correct in assuming that the stages correspond to a range of character types, we need, according to Hauser, stage specific studies - e.g., studies designed to determine the correlates of particular Loevinger stages. In the present study, we are both administering the Sentence Completion Test longitudinally and determining the conceptual and empirical overlap between Loevinger's measure and ours.

Table 2 provides a summary of the conceptual parallels between Loevinger's ego development stages and White's family relationship stages. Crucial to our data analyses is the assumption that the achievement of Loevinger's Stage 3/4 transition, which marks the beginning of the ability to take a third person perspective, would be necessary but not sufficient for achievement of FRI Stage 3, characterized by the individual's ability to show some perspective on the parent. We reasoned that some nonspecific perspective taking ability would precede the ability to apply that perspective to emotionally-laden, personally involving relationships with parents. We do not predict a linear relationship between the two measures beyond FRI Stage 3, because at that point further progress requires that the subject view the parent as moving towards recognition and acceptance of the subject as an individual adult. We assume there may be cases where the individual ego development of the subject proceeds, but the relationship with the parent is "stuck" because of parental characteristics.

Procedures

Project participants were recruited through advertisements in several newspapers, on the radio, and on bulletin boards in a variety of supermarkets and similar establishments. Individuals interested in the project mailed a brief form with their telephone numbers to the project staff, and then were called and

provided with further details about project goals and procedures. Questionnaire packets (including detailed informed consent forms and Loevinger's sentence completion tests) were mailed in advance of the interview date to all respondents agreeing to participate.

All subjects participated in tape-recorded individual interviews with a trained interviewer of their own sex in the Boston University Psychology Department. They received $5.00 an hour up to a maximum of $25.00 for their involvement. As part of informed consent procedures, it was made clear that they were being asked to participate in a three year project, and that they would be re-contacted in subsequent years for further participation. Also as part of the informed consent process we asked participants if we could send a questionnaire version of the Family Relationship Interview to their parents. Subjects either agreed and provided us with parent addresses, or checked a box on the Informed Consent Form indicating that they did not want a questionnaire mailed to their parents.

RESULTS

FRI stage scores in our sample of 120 subjects ranged from Stage 2 to Stage 4/5 (in transition from Stage 4 to Stage 5); scale scores ranged from 3 to 8. Factorial analyses of variance with age, sex, and marital status as predictor variables, and FRI scores as the dependent variable, are reported separately for mother and father in Tables 3 and 4. The analysis of variance with stage score for mother yielded statistically significant main effects for age ($F = 3.71$, $df = 2$, $p < .01$) and marital status ($F = 20.30$, $df = 1$, $p < .0005$) and a statistically significant age by sex interaction ($F = 4.72$, $df = 2$, $p < .01$). Although stage scores with mother and father are highly correlated ($\tau = .86$), ANOVAs on stage scores with father yielded only one finding statistically significant at the .05 level - i.e., marital status ($F = 23.51$, $df = 1$, $p < .0005$).

At the time of this report, ego development scores were available only for the 60 women in our sample of 120. Of the 58 women for whom we had both an ego development score and a FRI stage score with mother, only two subjects showed a pattern inconsistent with our notion that a Loevinger score of 3/4 would be necessary but not sufficient for an FRI score of 3. That is, only two women had a score of 3 or above on the FRI while having a score below 3/4 on the Loevinger (See Table 3). Of the 55 women scoring 3/4 or higher on the Loevinger, about equal numbers scored 3 and higher or 2/3 and lower on the FRI.

To improve our ability to predict FRI scores, we asked ourselves what other processes or experiences besides ability to demonstrate the third person perspective on Loevinger's Sentence Completion Test might contribute to a young woman's perspective on a parent, particularly on her mother. We reasoned that entering into the marriage role might serve this function. To test this hypothesis, we compared single and married women scoring 3/4 and above on the Loevinger to see how many were 3 and above or 2/3 and below on the FRI. Consistent with our hypothesis, a chi square analysis (Table 5) indicated that the married women were more likely to score at FRI stage 3 (perspective on mother) and above, whereas the single women were more likely to score at 2/3 and below. ($\chi^2 = 13.87$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$)

We continued our comparison of Loevinger and FRI stage scores by regrouping subjects into those scoring 3/4 or above on the FRI (indicating a participant belief that the parents were just beginning to be able to put themselves into the participant's shoes) or 3 and below (where the participant reports having some perspective on the parent but does not believe the process is mutual). As can be seen in Table 6, only 14 of the women scoring at Loevinger stage 3/4 and above also scored at FRI stage 3/4 and above. When we break the sample down by marital status (Table 6), we find that 14 of the 15 subjects scoring 3/4 and above on both measures are married.

Of our 120 subjects, 30 women and 32 men gave us permission to send questionnaire versions of the FRI to their parents. Out of this group of parents, 16 mothers and 13 fathers returned completed questionnaires to us. To determine the consistency between our participants' view of their relationships with their parents and their parents' view of the relationship, we computed the correlation between participant FRI scores with mother and father, and mother's and father's FRI scores with participant. From the 27 cases where we had both a participant score and a mother or father score, a Pearson product moment correlation of .75 ($p < .01$) was obtained.

DISCUSSION

Snapshots of the developmental history of intrafamilial caring relationships can be taken at any point in time and provide valuable insights into the exchanges which take place between the generations. Our data indicate that during the early and middle twenties, many young people - especially unmarried young people - are very involved in issues of individuation and are only beginning to see their parents as separate people with their own histories, motivations, and causes for behavior. In the age groups studied, the married women seemed to have a greater ability to put themselves in the shoes of others - including their mothers - than did single women. Moreover, across the three age groups, the young women showed more movement from lesser to greater perspective on their parents than did the young men, whose responses were more stable across the age groups.

We assume - and our data seem consistent with this assumption - that young people must see themselves as separate people, and begin to see their parents as separate people, before they can perceive any mutual recognition on the part of their parents. Although we do not have any direct empirical support for this perception, it is also clear that where mutual recognition and acknowledgement of each other as separate adults takes place, the young adults see themselves as the prime movers. That is, from the young adult's perspective, the child becomes able to see the parent as a "real person" and a peer before the parent becomes able to see the child from such a perspective.

This report clearly represents only a preliminary step in the construct validation of our measure and the exploration of the development of caring relationships. Future analysis of the data already obtained will allow us to learn more about our participants' psychological development, their interactions with their parents, and their closest relationships with peers. We remain hopeful that our data will contribute to the evolution of a view of family development that is anchored firmly in the concepts and findings of developmental psychology. Moreover, we hope to obtain a fuller picture of the extent to which adult caring relationships extending beyond the family of origin reflect or diverge from relationships with one's own parents.

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TABLE 1

GENERAL SCORING STAGES - FRI INTERVIEW

1. HIERARCHICAL P-C RELATIONSHIPS. S HAS LITTLE CONCEPTION OF SELF OR P AS SEPARATE INDIVIDUALS. NO EVIDENCE THAT S TREATED AS A PEER.

2. INDIVIDUATION ON PART OF S. S SEES SELF AS GROWING UP, BECOMING SEPARATE PERSON WITH OWN OPINIONS, SOME ABILITY TO TAKE CARE OF SELF. THIS IS DONE IN EITHER A POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE FAMILY ATMOSPHERE.

2/3. THERE IS EVIDENCE OF INDIVIDUATION PLUS SOME SIGNS THAT S BEGINNING TO HAVE SOME (NOT VERY FULLY ARTICULATED) PERSPECTIVE ON P AND THEIR POINTS-OF-VIEW WHERE THEY'RE "COMING FROM".

3. INDIVIDUATION PLUS PERSPECTIVE. EVIDENCE OF INDIVIDUATION PLUS ABILITY TO PUT SELF IN SHOES OF P, SEE THINGS THROUGH THEIR EYES.

3/4. NOT ONLY CAN S SEE WHERE P COMING FROM BUT THERE IS SOME EVIDENCE THAT S HAS SOME IDEA (NOT VERY WELL ARTICULATED) OF P's PERSPECTIVES ON S AS INDIVIDUAL. SOME EVIDENCE THAT P SEES S AS SEPARATE INDIVIDUAL.

4. INDIVIDUATION PLUS RECIPROCAL PERSPECTIVES. INDIVIDUATED S HAS WELL DEVELOPED PERSPECTIVE ON P PLUS CLEAR PICTURE OF HOW P VIEW HER/HIM AS AN INDIVIDUAL. MEANS THAT P CAN UNDERSTAND S BEING ADVICE GIVER, CARE GIVER, HAVING OPINIONS OF OWN. NEVERLESS THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE THAT S AND P BEHAVE LIKE PEERS TOWARD EACH OTHER.

4/5. ADD ON: SOME EVIDENCE THAT AT LEAST IN A FEW "SAFE" AREAS S AND P BEHAVE LIKE PEERS.

5. INCIPIENT OR PRAGMATIC MUTUALITY. THERE IS EVIDENCE OF PEER-LIKE INTERACTIONS BETWEEN AN S AND P WHO SEE EACH OTHER AS INDIVIDUATED PEOPLE BUT THESE ARE EITHER VERY RECENT AND/OR CONFINED TO RATHER SUPERFICIAL OR SAFE AREAS. IT'S A SUPERFICIAL OR CAUTIOUS PEERHOOD AT BEST.

5/6. THE RELATIONSHIP IS MOVING BEYOND THE SUPERFICIAL SORT OF MUTUALITY IN SOME AREAS. P AND C CAN BEHAVE LIKE REAL PEERS.

6. FULL PEER-LIKE MUTUALITY.

TABLE 2

CONCEPTUAL OVERLAP BETWEEN LOEVINGER AND FRI STAGES

LOEVINGER STAGES	FAMILY RELATIONSHIP STAGES
Δ SELF-PROTECTIVE STAGE CONTROL FIRST PERSON PERSPECTIVE	2 INDIVIDUATION STAGE INDEPENDENCE EGOCENTRIC POINT OF VIEW RIGHT-WRONG
Δ/3 TRANSITION RESPECT GOOD-BAD DICHOTOMIZING	
3 CONFORMIST STAGE INTEREST IN OTHERS POINT OF VIEW PLEASING OTHERS CONFORMIST VIEW LACK OF INTROSPECTION	2/3 TRANSITION TRYING TO UNDERSTAND PARENTS BUT DONE IN STEREOTYPIC TERMS
3/4 TRANSITION ABILITY TO TAKE THIRD PERSON PERSPECTIVE SENSE OF MOTIVES	3 INDIVIDUATION PLUS PERSPECTIVE STAGE ABILITY TO PUT SELF IN PARENTS' SHOES SENSE OF MOTIVES FOR PARENT BEHAVIOR
	3/4 TRANSITION PARENT BEGINNING TO VIEW CHILD AS SEPARATE PERSON

TABLE 3

COMPARISON OF MEANS AND ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE OF THE FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS INTERVIEW SCALE SCORE WITH MOTHER BY AGE, SEX, AND MARITAL STATUS[1]

A. MEAN SCALE SCORES

	AGE					
	22 YR. OLDS (N=40)		24 YR. OLDS (N=40)		26 YR. OLDS (N=40)	
	SINGLE	MARRIED	SINGLE	MARRIED	SINGLE	MARRIED
MALES N=60	4.40	5.10	4.10	5.30	4.67	4.70
FEMALES N=60	4.00	4.33	3.80	5.40	4.90	6.10

[1]ACTUAL CELL SIZES RANGE FROM 8 TO 10 FRI SCORES PER CELL. BECAUSE THE MOTHERS OF SOME SUBJECTS ARE DECEASED, THE TOTAL NUMBER OF MOTHER SCORES FOR THE SAMPLE OF 120 IS 107.

B. ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE RESULTS

SOURCE OF VARIATION	MEAN SQUARE	DEGREES OF FREEDOM	F VALUE	SIGNIFICANCE OF F VALUE
MAIN EFFECTS	7.38	4	7.03	.0005
SEX	0.09	1	0.09	.77
AGE	3.89	2	3.71	.03
MARITAL STATUS	21.31	1	20.30	.0005
TWO-WAY INTERACTIONS	3.15	5	3.00	.01
SEX BY AGE	4.95	2	4.72	.01
SEX BY MARITAL STATUS	1.21	1	1.15	.29
AGE BY MARITAL STATUS	2.22	2	2.11	.13
THREE-WAY INTERACTIONS	1.41	2	1.34	.27
SEX BY AGE BY MARITAL STATUS	1.41	2	1.34	.27

TABLE 4

COMPARISON OF MEANS AND ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE OF THE FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS INTERVIEW SCALE SCORE WITH FATHER BY AGE, SEX, AND MARITAL STATUS[2]

A. MEAN SCALE SCORES

	AGE					
	22 YR. OLDS (N=40)		24 YR. OLDS (N=40)		26 YR. OLDS (N=40)	
	SINGLE	MARRIED	SINGLE	MARRIED	SINGLE	MARRIED
MALES N=60	4.30	5.00	4.10	5.33	4.33	4.44
FEMALES N=60	3.89	4.33	3.80	5.38	4.38	5.38

ACTUAL CELL SIZES RANGE FROM 8 TO 10 FRI SCORES PER CELL, BECAUSE THE FATHERS OF SOME SUBJECTS ARE DECEASED OR HAVE BEEN ABSENT SINCE CHILDHOOD, THE TOTAL NUMBER OF FATHER SCORES FOR THE SAMPLE OF 120 IS 107.

B. ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE RESULTS

SOURCE OF VARIATION	MEAN SQUARE	DEGREES OF FREEDOM	F VALUE	SIGNIFICANCE OF F VALUE
MAIN EFFECTS	5.15	4	6.30	.0005
SEX	0.22	1	.27	.61
AGE	0.65	2	.80	.45
MARITAL STATUS	19.23	1	23.51	.0005
TWO-WAY INTERACTIONS	1.95	5	2.39	.04
SEX BY AGE	2.37	2	2.89	.06
SEX BY MARITAL STATUS	0.63	1	.77	.38
AGE BY MARITAL STATUS	2.15	2	.63	.08
THREE-WAY INTERACTIONS	0.74	2	.90	.41
SEX BY AGE BY MARITAL STATUS	0.74	2	.90	.41

TABLE 5

1) IS SHOWING PERSPECTIVE ON LOEVINGER'S SENTENCE COMPLETION TASK NECESSARY BUT NOT SUFFICIENT FOR SHOWING PERSPECTIVE TOWARDS MOTHER ON THE FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS INTERVIEW?

2) DOES BEING MARRIED INCREASE THE LIKELIHOOD THAT WOMEN WILL SHOW PERSPECTIVE TOWARDS THEIR MOTHERS ON THE FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS INTERVIEW?

DISTRIBUTION OF EGO DEVELOPMENT STAGE SCORES AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS STAGE SCORES (N=58 WOMEN)

LOEVINGER \ FRI	3↑	2/3↓
3/4↑	30	25
3↓	2	1

DISTRIBUTION OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS STAGE SCORES OF SINGLE AND MARRIED WOMEN SCORING 3/4 AND ABOVE IN EGO DEVELOPMENT (N=55)

LOEVINGER 3/4↑ \ FRI	3↑	2/3↓
SINGLE	9	20
MARRIED	21	5

$x^2 = 13.87$ $p < .001$

TABLE 6

1) ARE WOMEN WHO SHOW PERSPECTIVE ON LOEVINGER'S SENTENCE COMPLETION TASK MORE LIKELY THAN THOSE WHO DON'T TO BE IN TRANSITION TO A STAGE OF MUTUAL RESPECT WITH THEIR MOTHERS ON THE FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS INTERVIEW?

2) DOES BEING MARRIED INCREASE THE LIKELIHOOD THAT WOMEN WILL BE IN TRANSITION TO A STAGE OF MUTUAL RESPECT WITH THEIR MOTHERS ON THE FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS INTERVIEW?

DISTRIBUTION OF EGO DEVELOPMENT STAGE SCORES AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS STAGE SCORES (N=58 WOMEN)

LOEVINGER \ FRI	3/4↑	3↓
3/4↑	14	41
3↓	2	1

DISTRIBUTION OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS STAGE SCORES OF SINGLE AND MARRIED WOMEN SCORING 3/4 AND ABOVE IN EGO DEVELOPMENT (N=55)

LOEVINGER \ FRI	3/4↑	3↓
SINGLE	1	28
MARRIED	13	13

$x^2 = 15.65$ $p < .001$